

The art on our bulletin, by [John August Swanson](#), [IMAGE 1] captures the spirit of joy that attends the people of God as they join in a procession to the heart of God.

Mr. Swanson, who joined the heavenly chorus on September 23rd this year, called THE PROCESSION “the grand work of my life.” He writes: [IMAGE 2]

“I was profoundly moved by a procession [I witnessed] at [San Javier del Bac Mission](#) [and] was inspired to gather together earlier drawings...to create something wonderful.

[IMAGE 3] Each of my 89 drawings used for printing [the serigraph] began to create the sense of a rich mosaic. [IMAGE 4]

“The places that inspired this image are the beautiful cathedrals [IMAGE 5] I have seen in Europe and Mexico... sacred places used for procession.

There are sacred places throughout the world [IMAGE 6] for all beliefs, places that have special meaning in the lives of people who journey to get there.

We, in our communities of faith, (he goes on) are a procession of stories, [IMAGE 7] stories both unique and shared, stories connected to those who have gone before us and those who will come after us.”¹ [END]

What a beautiful summary of what this day is about:

A procession of stories, unique and shared, connecting us to those who’ve gone before us and those who’ll come after us.

**Today we’re lifting up the lives of four people from our community—all of them women—who have joined the Great Cloud of Witnesses over the past year:
ESTHER, BETTY, RUTH, and MARY.**

And I want to spend a few moments talking about each of them.

Three of these women were born in the 1920’s and their lives spanned such a remarkable and tumultuous century in the history of our world:

- The Great Depression and the Dust Bowl;
- World War 2;
- The dawn of the Space Age and the evolution of technology;
- and the first decades of this 21st century, fraught with all manner of conflicts, changes and challenges.

^{1 4} You can find the painting and his commentary on it, with quotations used here @: <http://www.johnaugustswanson.com/default.cfm/PID%3d1.2-22.html>

When ESTHER was born in her grandparents' farmhouse in North Central Minnesota on July 4, 1925 electricity for rural counties was still a decade away.

When she was baptized on August 16, 1925, her parents promised to raise her in the Christian faith. God made promises too—that she was God's forever child, marked indelibly by the cross of Christ; promised a place in the beloved community in this life and in the life to come.

The eldest of seven children, she attended a one room country schoolhouse and learned early on to shoulder her share of responsibility for others.

[IMAGE 8 Esther HS] When she graduated from Park Rapids High in 1943, in the middle of WW2, her eyes became set on bigger things. **[END]** She left her small-town home for the big city of Minneapolis, and when word got out that the Boeing Company of Seattle was hiring women as well as men she took the train west and became **[IMAGE 9 Riveter]** a real-life "Rosie the Riveter."

It was while working at Boeing that she met her husband-to-be Orville. **[END]** He knew a good thing when he saw it, and they were married in 1945 and for 67 years shared their lives while raising four children and welcoming five grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren into the world.

[IMAGE 10 Esther] Esther celebrated her Finnish heritage; and practiced her Lutheran faith, first at Hope Lutheran, then at Calvary, and finally at Peace, all the while cultivating her role as the calm center at the heart of her family.

We give thanks to God for Esther. [END]

Born on February 1st, 1923, BETTY LOUISE was the youngest of five children in her 1st generation German immigrant family.

She met her future husband, Al, after the War, when they were both enrolled at Washington State university. They would end up sharing 73 years together.

[IMAGE 11 Betty] A favorite photo of her and Al was taken at their engagement dance party, and dancing became their signature activity. **[END]**

When our family came to Seattle, it wasn't long before they invited us out dancing.

[IMAGE 12 Betty 2 dancing] Watching them glide across the floor at the Women's University Club, every move choreographed in perfect unity, gave us something to aspire to. **[END]**

Psalm 23 was a Betty favorite, a psalm of David. Six verses that compress a whole lifetime of journeying. The final verse begins:

“Goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life...”

The verb David chose for “FOLLOW” is a powerful one. The line might better be translated: “*Goodness and mercy shall pursue me all the days of my life,*” as in: “*God’s friendliness and kindness will run after me, chase me down, grab me, and hold me.*”

It’s a reminder that we are all being chased by the Good Shepherd’s powerful love. We run from it, and try to escape it. Our own efforts, we think at times, are better than God’s mercy.

But the truth is, our life is not willed by God to be one of endless anxiety—it is meant to be an embrace. And that means being caught by God.

[IMAGE 13 Betty] Betty knew what being chased by God’s love—and caught—was like. She knew the Good Shepherd’s embrace.

We give thanks to God for Betty. [END]

RUTH THEODORA was born on a small farm near Fruitland, Washington, Northwest of Spokane, one of 8 children. She was a country girl and at a young age began doing her part feeding the chickens, milking the cows, helping with the horses, and all the other chores that come with living on the farm. [IMAGE 14 Ruth HS]

Ruth attended Columbia High School in Hunters, Washington, where she—[IMAGE 15 RuthBB] all of 5 feet in height—played on the girls’ basketball team. [END]

The story’s told that a certain Navy vet back from the war began dating Ruth’s sister Alyda. But he grew tired of Alyda always being late, so one day he decided to ask out her sister Ruth instead. And that was all it took.

[IMAGE 16 Rut family] Before long Ruth and Carl—KENNY she called him—were married and set about raising a family. [END]

Coming to worship every week was important to Carl and Ruth—so regular was their appearance that you could set your clock by it.

I’ll never forget how, during adult class one Sunday, when the topic was listening for the voice of God, Ruth suddenly piped up from the back of the room: HAVE YOU HEARD THE VOICE OF GOD? I’VE HEARD THE VOICE OF GOD! she said, and heads swiveled as she went on to tell the story...

She was on the farm riding her horse out on the prairie when one of its hooves stepped into a ground nest of wasps. In the melee that followed, the horse bolted and Ruth ended up on the ground forced to face the attacking wasps alone.

It was then that she heard a Voice telling her: GO TO THE LAKE!

Following the VOICE, she got up and ran as fast as her legs could carry her to the nearby lake and submerged herself. The wasps ceased their attack. Ruth survived.

What Ruth came to understand, and what she wanted all of us to know, was that it was GOD'S VOICE she heard that day. It was HIS VOICE that saved her life.

[IMAGE 17 Ruth] Ruth's memory faded in her final years, her inner joy never diminished.

"Do whatever you can for the people around you," Ruth would teach her children and grandchildren. "Leave this earth a better place." And she has. [END]

We give thanks to God for RUTH.

The story of the final person we remember today, MARY KATE FAST HORSE, is the least well known among us, yet she is fully known to God.

Born in Pine Ridge, South Dakota, of Oglala Sioux heritage, and raised by her grandparents, Mary was introduced to Peace through Signa, who, over time, became a mentor and friend.

[IMAGE18 Mary] Mary's presence in worship on a Sunday morning was something I always looked forward to because when Mary walked into a room, the room got brighter.

Though she was not with us long, she left an impression on those of us who met her. She exuded a sense of calm and inner joy. [END]

Though several places were "home" to Mary—including Pine Ridge and Denver—she consistently returned to Seattle. And when she did, she made a point of coming here to worship.

Like so many Native women, Mary bore the weight of layers of personal and communal grief on her shoulders. She worked hard at staying whole.

After Mary's unexpected death last March, her daughter Kiara came to Seattle to bring Mary back home to be buried with her ancestors.

Kiara wrote of her mother: [IMAGE 19 Mary FB]

Mary's smile was contagious. She had a rare sense of humor and a distinctive laugh. She was loved by many and known to be kind, always carrying herself with the utmost respect. She was a Lakota woman through and through. From her toes to her brown skin to her beautiful bundles of black hair, her dignity was on display.

[IMAGE 20 Mary babe] She was known to be the protector of the family, always taking care of others, from her grandchildren to lifelong friends and family. Mary Kate loved hard. At times her friends were her chosen family. Her spirit will carry on with her children and grandchildren. [END IMAGE]

There's a phrase in the language of Mary's people—a prayer really—that speaks to the interconnected nature of all things: **Metakuye Oyasin**. It means: "All My Relations."²

The prayer offers a radically different view of our human place in the circle of life than what many of us are accustomed to.

Metakuye Oyasin rejects the hierarchical pyramid which the West has superimposed on the world. It testifies that we find our true place, and our relationship to other beings, NOT by looking above us or below us, as but by looking across the circle.

The prayer helps us see that we are all relatives through the grace and by the design of the Creator.

Metakuye Oyasin Mary...

We give thanks for your life, and your God-breathed soul.

May you know God's tender compassion in the life of the world to come.

² This prayer is an integral part of Lakota pipe ceremonies, sweat ceremonies, and other sacred occasions. I became personally familiar with the prayer when I served as Director of Lutheran Ministry with Native Americans on the North Coast of California from 1986-1991. Though Tribal communities of that region have their own languages and sacred ceremonies in which similar sentiments accompany the prayers, I found that this Lakota prayer, Mitakuye Oyasin, was widely used among urban Indian communities and gatherings that bring people of different tribal traditions together.

In her eulogy for John August Swanson, Cecilia González-Andrieu speaks of the luminous and hope filled religious sensibility embodied in his work, which made his work appeal to a broad audience.³

This sensibility, wrote González-Andrieu, arose “out of lo cotidiano, the small details of life where the sacred reveals itself.”

It is in these small details, rather than in grand revelations, that God most often reveals his sacred presence.

And it’s in the weaving of these smaller stories into God’s larger unfolding tapestry that our Procession through this life becomes ever more meaningful and hopeful.

I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb... this Lamb, at the center of the throne, is their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” (Revelation 7:9, 17)

Amen.

³ See her full obituary in America: The Jesuit Review. <https://www.americamagazine.org/arts-culture/2021/09/23/john-august-swanson-death-art-241485>